

# 17 Nov 2019: Comprehensive News Analysis

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A. GS 1 Related

### B. GS 2 Related

#### **HEALTH**

1. [Delhi has the most unsafe tap water](#)

### C. GS 3 Related

#### **ECONOMY**

1. [Governance key concern for PSBs: Das](#)

#### **ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

1. ['Wasteland conversion threatens livelihoods, ecological balance'](#)
2. [Burning fields: farmers say they are helpless](#)

### D. GS 4 Related

### E. Editorials

#### **ECONOMY**

1. [Fixing a minimum wage](#)

#### **INTERNAL SECURITY**

1. [What are the surveillance laws in India?](#)

#### **POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

1. [What does the Places of Worship Act protect?](#)

### F. Tidbits

1. [Carbon capture ways](#)

### G. Prelims Facts

1. [Kerala on track to eliminate TB by 2025:](#)
2. [SeeTB: new diagnostic tool for detecting tuberculosis](#)
3. [Weeding out black hole mimickers by looking at gravitational waves](#)

### H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

### I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

## A. GS 1 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## B. GS 2 Related

**Category: HEALTH**

### 1. **Delhi has the most unsafe tap water**

**Context:**

A new study shows that New Delhi's tap water is the most unsafe among 21 State capitals in India.

**Details:**

- The BIS standard involves 48 different parameters. Samples are being tested under 28 parameters so far, leaving out parameters related to radioactive substances and free residual chlorine.
- Samples undergo physical and organoleptic tests (which identify the odour, turbidity and pH levels), as well as chemical tests and virological, bacteriological and biological tests (which identify harmful organisms and disease carriers).
- The national capital is at the very bottom of the list, in a ranking based on tap water quality released by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).
- Delhi is among 13 cities where all tested samples failed to meet the BIS norms for piped drinking water, including Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Lucknow. Coliform and E.Coli samples were found in all Delhi samples, along with excess metals such as aluminium, manganese, magnesium, ammonia, and iron.
- Mumbai is the only city where all samples of tap water met all the tested parameters under the Indian Standard 10500:2012 (specification for drinking water).

#### **The relevance of the study:**

- The study, conducted by the BIS for the Union Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry, showed that even in urban areas, which are connected to the piped water network, there is no guarantee that the water is safe for consumption.
- While it is mandatory for bottled water manufacturers to meet quality standards, the BIS standard is voluntary for the public agencies which supply and distribute piped water.
- The Ministry is writing to all State governments to develop a consensus on making the standard mandatory.

#### **Way forward:**

- Under its flagship Jal Jeevan Mission, the Centre aims to provide safe piped water to all households by 2024, with the government promising to spend over ₹3.5 lakh crore on the scheme.
- The recent study emphasizes the need to ensure not just the requisite amount of water but also to ensure that the water supplied meets the set standards.

## **C. GS 3 Related**

### **Category: ECONOMY**

#### **1. Governance key concern for PSBs: Das**

##### **Context:**

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das's statement on the importance of corporate governance in the Public Sector Banks (PSB).

##### **Details:**

- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has stated that corporate governance remained the central concern of public sector banks, the lack of which was responsible for problems such as high bad loans, capital shortfalls, and frauds.
- Public sector banks are those in which the government holds more than 50% of its shareholding.

### **Significance of PSB's:**

- In India, banks have played an important role in economic growth and development with public sector banks (PSBs) at the forefront of mobilizing resources from far-flung rural areas as well as extending banking services in the remotest parts of the country.
- PSBs which account for nearly 70 percent of banking activity in the country, is considered the lifeline of the Indian economy.
- The growth of the Indian economy depends on PSBs ability to flow credit into the market and maintaining sufficient liquidity. If that doesn't happen, the economy as a whole will shrink. To keep the economy in good health, PSBs existence and their functioning are a must.
- Public Sector Banks have a predominant share of infrastructure funding which is very important for economic development.
- The burden of social agenda has largely been shouldered by PSBs without any compensation.

### **Concerns with PSB's:**

#### Non-Performing Asset (NPA):

- The Non-Performing Assets (or bad loans) in the Public Sector Banks has been a matter of concern for both the Government and the Central Bank.
- The NPAs have been historically plaguing the PSBs. That's an alarming situation for a developing economy which relies heavily on bank loans for development.
- Even though NPAs are omnipresent in the whole banking sector (both private and public), the public sector is acutely affected.
- Variety of legacy issues including the delay caused in various approvals as well as land acquisition etc., and also because of low global and domestic demand, many large projects are strained.
- Public Sector Banks which have a predominant share of infrastructure financing have been affected by this phenomenon. Bad decision making or failure to correctly asses creditworthiness has also added to the problem.
- From a commercial point of view, PSBs are still bound by certain restrictions. PSBs don't enjoy the same level of freedom that private sector banks enjoy.

#### Capital shortfall:

- High NPAs have resulted in lower profitability of Public Sector Banks, mainly due to provisioning for the restructured projects as well as for gross NPAs. This has reduced the lending ability of PSBs and has restricted credit flow into the market.
- The Prompt corrective action norms set by RBI is no doubt necessary to reduce the risk of NPAs but this has constricted the lending ability of the banks under PCA norms. A majority of banks under PCA are PSBs.

#### Frauds:

- RBI's latest edition of Financial Stability Report shows that PSBs accounted for a staggering 85 percent of nearly 6,500 fraud cases, amounting to more than Rs 30,000 crore.
- In recent years, frauds reported in the Indian banking sector show an increasing trend both in terms of numbers and quantum. In terms of the relative share of frauds, PSBs have a disproportionate share (more than 85 percent) significantly exceeding their relative business share.
- The bulk of banking frauds was loan-related. The quantum and share of PSU bank frauds were much higher than their credit and deposit share which stands at 65 and 75 percent respectively. The fraud amount reported in PSBs is well in excess of their relative share in the credit.
- The lax internal controls in the PSBs is a concern. PSBs lack effective credit screening and oversight mechanisms resulting in a high volume of loan fraud.

## Way forward:

### Governance Reforms:

- The role of independent boards in fostering a compliance culture by establishing the proper systems of control, audit and distinct reporting of business and risk management has been found wanting in some PSBs.
- Governance issues in private sector banks originated from an altogether different set of concerns, which were mainly related to the incentive structure of their managements, quality of audits and compliance, and functioning of audit and risk management committees. These are lacking in PSBs and there is an urgent need to ensure better governance structure in PSBs.
- The only way to ensure that PSBs are properly run is to put in place professional managements and insulate them from political interference. Aware of this need, the current government created the Banks Board Bureau. But after doing this the Government did not give it the space it needed to ensure the effectiveness of the reform.
- The parameters of Customer Responsiveness, Responsible Banking, Credit Off-take, Support to MSMEs, Deepening Financial Inclusion & Digitalization and HR reforms need to be introduced in the reform Agenda. The Reform Agenda needs to be institutionalized and it will function as the Report Card for PSBs.

### Merger:

- The process of merger of PSBs needed to be executed without any disruption. However, the merger process has to be executed without creating any disruption in the normal functioning of these banks.
- The government had earlier announced the merger of 10 public sector banks into four, and the process is expected to be completed by March 2020.

### IBC as a game-changer:

- On the resolution of stressed assets, despite delays in resolution in the bankruptcy process, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 had been a game-changer.
- Despite the teething problems in the new law, the system should work towards strengthening the IBC further.

### **Additional information from the article:**

- Various efforts towards the resolution of stressed assets had resulted in non-performing assets (NPAs) of the banking system declining for the first time in March 2019 after a gap of seven years.
- Fresh slippages wrt NPA has declined and the system-level provision coverage ratio jumped to 60.5% from 48.3% in 2018.
- The capital adequacy ratio of the banking system has increased to 14.3%, much higher than the Basel norms, which is due to the recapitalisation of PSBs to the tune of ₹2.9 lakh crore.
- The steps taken over the years have led to the digital payments-to-GDP ratio rising to 8.6% at end-March 2019, from 6.7% at end-March 2016.

## **Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

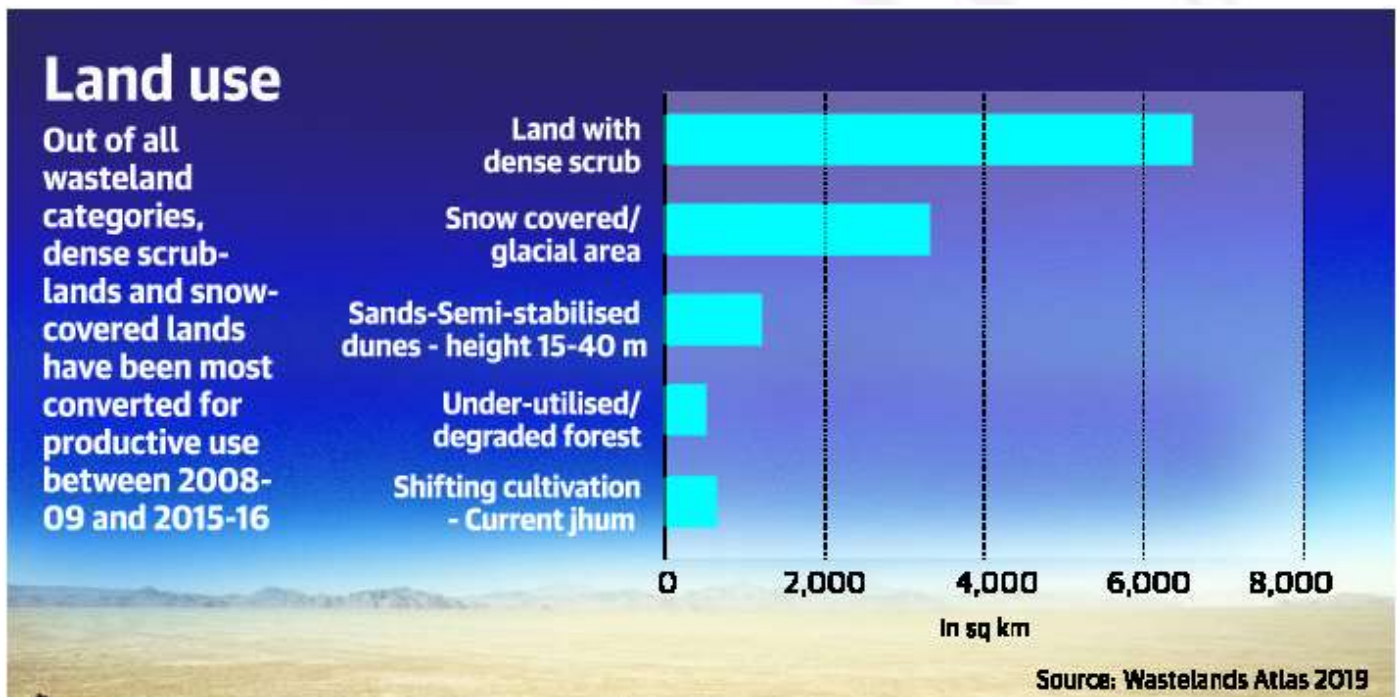
### **1. 'Wasteland conversion threatens livelihoods, ecological balance'**

#### **Context:**

## Efforts underway in India to convert wastelands.

### Details:

- In India, there has been a conversion of more than 14,000 square km of 'wasteland', mostly dense scrub, glacial areas, sands or marshland into productive use between 2008-09 and 2015-16.
- The government is also targeting to restore 26 million hectares of wasteland and degraded land by 2030.
- The Wastelands Atlas, prepared in collaboration with the National Remote Sensing Centre and released recently by the Land Resources Department uses satellite data to measure the extent of 23 different types of wastelands and tracks the impact of reclamation efforts.
- While 14,536 sq. km of wasteland were converted to productive use, the country saw a net conversion of 8,404 sq. km. This is because some of the previously used lands might be classified as a wasteland in the recent survey owing to degradation or lack of utilization.
- Over half of the reclamation has happened in Rajasthan, where a net change of 4,803 sq. km was seen, with large areas of scrub and sands brought under the plough and converted to cultivated cropland. The State also has extensive solar parks set up in its wastelands, thus converting them to industrial use in the production of renewable energy.
- Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have also had high levels of net conversion.



### Significance:

- The government has been encouraging wasteland conversion, pointing out that while India has 18% of the world's population, it only has 2.4% of the land area. The per capita land availability of India is one of the lowest in the world. Increasing the productive land available will help make more land available for human activities.
- In order to ensure food security, there is an urgent need to improve the productivity of existing cultivated lands and to bring additional land under plough. The wastelands which are unutilized and have the potential to produce food grain and provide vegetation cover may significantly contribute to ensuring food security.
- The government has suggested reclamation and afforestation efforts, infrastructure and renewable energy projects as ways to convert wasteland to productive use, apart from conversion to cropland.

### Concerns:

Eminent environmental policy researchers and social activists have pointed out several concerns with respect to the conversion of wastelands.

#### The Idea of wasteland is wrong:

- Environmentalists say the idea of a wasteland is a political construct. It was the East India Company that first categorized these areas as a wasteland, as they didn't produce any tangible revenue for them. Many of these have been common areas for centuries and to regard them as unproductive is a problem.
- In southern India, these areas have traditionally been called 'poromboke' land which is communally owned, cannot be bought, sold or built on. In Karnataka, the gomal lands are common grazing areas. In other regions, village forests and pastures, or gram panchayat lands, have played a similar role from medieval times.
- Classifying shifting cultivation or common grazing lands as wasteland and trying to convert them into cropland, plantations or solar parks is akin to endorsing a hierarchical idea of livelihoods wherein lesser importance is given to say a pastoralist than a farmer. This might not be the right approach considering the unique characteristics of the given land and area.

#### Impact on livelihoods:

- The wasteland conversion risks affecting the livelihoods of pastoralists, fishermen and nomadic farmers who are often dependent on these traditional "commons" lands.
- Pastoral communities depend on common grazing land, gatherers and nomadic farmers depend on scrub forest and open scrubland for shifting cultivation, while fishermen can make a living off waterlogged and marshy areas.

#### Impact on ecological balance:

- These traditional 'commons' act as a buffer against floods, droughts, and pollution for a wider population.
- Chennai had paid a heavy price for converting wastelands such as the Pallikaranai marsh or the Ennore creek backwaters, into industrial, built-up areas. The flooding in recent times happened because marshland was treated as waste rather than a valuable buffer. The backwaters protect inland water resources from encroaching salinity and seawater inundation, as well as storing water for dry seasons.
- The common land areas protect unique biodiversity resources, which could be destroyed when development occurs.

### Way forward:

India's developmental needs cannot be at the cost of ecological imbalance. Any developmental work must ensure it leads to sustainable development which ensures not only ecological balance is maintained but also the social and economic development of the poorest.

## 2. Burning fields: farmers say they are helpless

### Context:

Despite a Supreme Court order against stubble burning, paddy growers are continuing with the practice in Punjab.

## Background:

- Punjab was traditionally not a rice-growing State. Earlier, it used to grow maize and cotton among other crops in May-June and wheat in October-November.
- In the 1960s, the government pushed the farmers to grow rice as India had to feed millions of people through many direct and indirect subsidies.
- Unlike in south India, the farmers in Punjab do not prefer to give paddy stubble as fodder to cattle and thus disposing of the residue becomes a problem.
- In the 1980s, the farmers started using combine harvesters to cut paddy and it left longer stubble, about 50-60 cm long, in the fields, compared to cutting by hand, which left behind 5-10 cm long residue. The longer stubble led to an increase in the burning of stubble.
- The government has started providing different machines to treat the stubble at 50% subsidy to individual farmers and 80% subsidy to farmers' groups.
- The Supreme Court on November 4 termed the air pollution in Delhi-NCR "worse than Emergency" and directed the governments of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to immediately stop the farmers from burning the stubble.

## Details:

- At least 10 million metric tons of the 20 million metric tons of paddy stubble generated in Punjab every year are burnt by farmers, according to the State government.
- Stubble burning is the most economical solution for them to prepare their fields for the next crop. Any other method to dispose of the crop residue would cost the farmers thousands of rupees per acre in the form of labour, rent and machines and transport cost.
- The number of stubble fires in Punjab fields between September 23 and October 13 has grown from 44,845 in 2018 to 48,689 this year resulting in a rise of 8.5%, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.
- The north-westerly wind carries the smoke from the stubble burnt in Punjab and Haryana to Delhi, contributing to the city's air pollution in a range between 0% and 53% (in the last two years), as per the central government-run monitoring agency SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research).
- Despite the awareness of the consequences of stubble burning the farmers continue with the practice mainly because of the lack of other viable alternatives.

## Earlier attempts to stop stubble burning:

- The Happy Seeder is one of the machines the government has been pushing as a solution to stubble burning. It can be attached to a tractor and can sow the wheat seed with the paddy stubble still standing in the field.
- Another machine, 'straw chopper', is used to cut the standing stubble into small pieces and evenly distribute it on the field. This can act as mulch for the subsequent crops.
- The Punjab government has decided to pay ₹2,500 per acre to all small and marginal farmers who did not burn their stubble.
- Two other Supreme Court directives to the governments — to collect stubble and give machines free of cost to small and marginal farmers — are set to kick off.

## Concerns:

- There have been operational difficulties with happy seeder machines. While many of the bigger farmers, who used the machines, faced problems, smaller farmers said they could not afford the machines and their running cost.
- In the case of straw chopper machine, the crop germination did not happen properly and the layer of stubble caused pest infection leading to loss of crop.

- There have been productivity declines observed with the new methods.
- The recent monetary incentives came late when almost 90% of the farmers have already burnt the stubble in their fields rendering the scheme ineffective.

### **Way forward:**

#### Monetary incentive:

- The ₹2,500 incentive announced by the government will go a long way in stopping stubble burning. A well-implemented plan next year may reduce the burning of stubble by about 80%.
- Provide ₹100 per quintal [of rice] to all farmers, small and big, if they do not burn the stubble is also worth considering.
- A combination of the above two monetary incentives seems the only solution to prevent stubble burning.

#### In situ Treatment of stubble:

- Treat the stubble in situ by using a combination of different machines and the government must provide the incentive in the form of monetary assistance and policy backing. There is a scope to convert this challenge into an opportunity if the stubble can be converted into an economic product.

## **D. GS 4 Related**

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## **E. Editorials**

### **Category: ECONOMY**

#### **1. Fixing a minimum wage**

##### **Context:**

Public consultations over the rules for the Code on Wages, 2019.

##### **Background:**

- The President has given his assent to the Code on Wages, 2019, that had earlier been approved by Parliament.
- The Code, which replaces four laws — the Payment of Wages Act, 1936; the Minimum Wages Act, 1948; the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965; and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 — seeks to regulate wages and bonuses for all workers employed by any industry, trade, business or manufacturer.
- While the Code is now law, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has published the draft rules for implementing the provisions and sought comments from stakeholders.



- Following the consultation, the Centre will notify the rules that will create the mechanisms to fix a floor wage that would then undergird the minimum wages for different categories of workers — unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled — that the States and Central government would have to set and enforce.

#### **Details of the code:**

- The Code acknowledges that the aim in setting the floor wage is to ensure “minimum living standards” for workers and the draft rules incorporate criteria declared in a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in 1992.
- These include the net calorific needs for a working-class family (defined as the earning worker, spouse and two children or the equivalent of three adult consumption units) set at 2,700 calories per day per consumption unit, their annual clothing requirements at 66 metres per family, house rent expenses assumed at 10% of food and clothing expenditure, as well as expenses on children’s education, medical needs, recreation and contingencies.
- The rules, similarly, cover almost the entire gamut of wage-related norms including the number of hours of work that would constitute a normal working day (set at nine hours), time interval for revision of dearness allowance, night shifts and overtime and criteria for making deductions.
- A separate chapter of the draft rules also deals with the payment of bonus while another lays down the guidelines for the formation of the Central Advisory Board as well as its functioning.

#### **Significance of the code:**

- Minimum wages are accepted globally to be a vital means to both combating poverty and, equally crucially, ensuring the vibrancy of any economy.
- In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and the erosion of purchasing power worldwide, the International Labour Conference’s Global Jobs Pact of 2009 identified “the regular adjustment of wages, in consultation with the social partners” as a means of reducing inequality, increasing demand and contributing to economic stability.
- The Finance Ministry’s Economic Survey, in July, had in a chapter titled ‘Redesigning a Minimum Wage System in India for Inclusive Growth’ stressed the importance of establishing an effective minimum wage system.
- A statutory national minimum wage would have multiple impacts including helping lift wage levels and reducing wage inequality, thus furthering inclusive growth, according to the Economic survey. For India to reap the much-touted ‘demographic dividend’, robust wage expansion would ultimately be essential to help buoy consumption-led economic growth.

#### **Minimum wage suggestions:**

- While a national minimum wage of ₹176 per day had been recommended in 2017, an expert committee constituted by the Labour Ministry in 2019 recommended that a “need-based national minimum wage for India” ought to be fixed at ₹375 per day (₹9,750 per month). The committee had also mooted payment of a city compensatory allowance averaging up to ₹55 per day for urban workers.
- Earlier, in 2015, the Seventh Central Pay Commission had recommended setting the minimum pay for government employees at ₹18,000 per month.
- In September 2019, the Delhi government set a minimum wage of ₹14,842 per month for unskilled workers after the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the local government, brushing aside the objections raised by a plethora of employers’ associations.

#### **Concerns:**

- The points of contention include the nine-hour working day definition, a lack of clarity in the rules on the scope for up-gradation of workers' skill category and the lack of representation for trade unions in the wage fixation committee.
- The ultimate success of the Code will be determined by the extent to which the minimum wage set is both fair and actually implemented so as to benefit the millions of workers in the unorganised sectors of the economy.

### **Impact on the economy:**

- The code on wages is bound to have a profound impact on the economy. The impact would depend on the final floor wage or wages (there could be different floor wages for different geographical areas) that the Centre will choose to set.

For more information on the code on wages: [Click Here](#)

## **Category:INTERNAL SECURITY**

### **1. What are the surveillance laws in India?**

#### **Context:**

In the backdrop of the WhatsApp breach, there have been concerns raised over the lack of a data protection law in India.

#### **Background:**

- There were reports in the leading publications in October 2019 that phones of several dozen Indian journalists, lawyers and human rights activists had been compromised using an invasive Israeli-developed malware called Pegasus.
- Messaging platform WhatsApp, through which the malware was disseminated, has reported that 121 individuals were targeted in India alone.
- A lawsuit was filed against Israeli cyber intelligence firm NSO by WhatsApp and its parent company Facebook in a U.S. court in California, accusing it of using their messaging platform to despatch Pegasus for surveillance to approximately 1,400 mobile phones and devices worldwide.
- The NSO claims that it only sells the software to governments but the Indian government has denied purchasing it and has asked WhatsApp to explain the security breach.

#### **Laws regarding state surveillance:**

- The laws governing the aspect of state surveillance are the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, which deals with interception of calls, and the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, which deals with interception of data.
- Under both laws, only the government, under certain circumstances, is permitted to conduct surveillance and not private actors.
- Hacking is expressly prohibited under the IT Act. Section 43 and Section 66 of the IT Act covers the civil and criminal offences of data theft and hacking respectively. Section 66B covers punishment for dishonestly receiving stolen computer resource or communication. The punishment includes imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years.
- There have been concerns raised about the laws regarding legal surveillance stressing the need for checks and balances to be built into these laws. In 1996, the Supreme Court noted that there was a lack

of procedural safeguards in the Indian Telegraph Act. It laid down some guidelines that were later codified into rules in 2007. This included a specific rule that orders on interceptions of communication should only be issued by the Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- These rules were partly reflected in the IT (Procedures and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules framed in 2009 under the IT Act.
- The rules state that only the competent authority can issue an order for the interception, monitoring or decryption of any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource including mobile phones. The competent authority is once again the Union Home Secretary or the State Secretaries in charge of the Home Departments.

### Concerns:

- Though there are legal routes to surveillance that can be conducted by the government, unauthorized surveillance is illegal in India.
- In 2018, the Central government created a furore when it authorised 10 Central agencies to conduct surveillance — the Intelligence Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the National Investigation Agency, the Research & Analysis Wing, the Directorate of Signal Intelligence, the Narcotics Control Bureau, the Enforcement Directorate, the Central Board of Direct Taxes, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the Delhi Police Commissioner.
- In the face of criticism that it was building a ‘surveillance state’, the government countered that it was building upon the rules laid down in 2009 and the agencies would still need approval from a competent authority, usually the Union Home Secretary. The 2018 action of the Union government has been challenged in the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court in a landmark decision in August 2017 (Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) and Anr. vs Union Of India And Others) unanimously upheld the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. This verdict is a building block and an important component of the legal battles that are to come over the state’s ability to conduct surveillance. But as yet a grey area remains between privacy and the state’s requirements for security.
- In 2017, the government constituted a Data Protection Committee under retired Justice B.N. Srikrishna. After holding public hearings across India, it submitted a draft data protection law in 2018 which Parliament is yet to enact. Experts have pointed out, however, that the draft law does not deal adequately with surveillance reform.
- A recent study by the U.K.-based security firm Comparitech and the corresponding survey of 47 countries to see where governments are failing to protect privacy or are creating surveillance states places India at the number three spot. The report highlights that in India, the major lacunae is the fact that its data protection Bill is yet to take effect and there isn’t a data protection authority in place.

### International Experiences:

The aspect of state surveillance or legal surveillance continues to be a grey area around the world.

#### United States of America:

- Electronic surveillance is considered a search under the Fourth Amendment which protects individuals from unreasonable search and seizure. The government has to obtain a warrant from a court in each case and crucially, establish probable cause to believe a search is justified.
- It also has to provide a specific time period under which the surveillance is to be conducted and to describe in particularity the conversation that is to be intercepted. There are very few exceptions or exigent circumstances under which the government may proceed without a warrant.
- After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the USA PATRIOT (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act was passed.

- Under certain provisions in this Act, the U.S. government used phone companies to collect information on millions of citizens and these were part of revelations made by the whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013.
- Many aspects of the PATRIOT Act, particularly those involving surveillance, were to lapse after a certain time period but they were re-authorised by Congress. It's an issue the U.S. still struggles with and several rights groups argue that the Act violates the Constitution.

#### **Way forward:**

- Privacy of the citizens and the state's requirements for security are equally important. The aspect of state surveillance or legal surveillance continues to be a grey area around the world. The best way to avoid misuse is to come up with a well-defined law.
- The data protection Bill with adequate safeguards needs to be passed at the earliest.

#### **For more information on the issue click the below articles:**

1. [‘WhatsApp did not inform govt. of system breach’](#)
2. [Pegasus misadventure](#)

### **Category:POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **1. What does the Places of Worship Act protect?**

##### **Context:**

The recent Ayodhya verdict and the reference made to the places of worship act in the verdict.

##### **Background:**

- When the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute was at its height, in the early 1990s, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other Hindu organisations also laid claim to two other mosques — the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah in Mathura.
- There were concerns that there would be more claims in the future. In this backdrop, the P.V. Narasimha Rao government enacted, in September 1991, a special law to freeze the status of places of worship as they were on August 15, 1947.
- The law kept the disputed structure at Ayodhya out of its purview, mainly because it was the subject of prolonged litigation. It was also aimed at providing scope for a possible negotiated settlement.

##### **Objectives of the Act:**

- The aim of the Act was to freeze the status of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. It was also to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of such a place of worship as on that day.
- The act was intended to pre-empt new claims by any group about the past status of any place of worship and attempts to reclaim the structures or the land on which they stood. It was hoped that the legislation would help the preservation of communal harmony in the long run.

##### **Main features:**

- The Act declares that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947. It says no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- The law declared that all suits, appeals or any other proceedings regarding converting the character of a place of worship, which are pending before any court or authority on August 15, 1947, will abate as soon as the law comes into force. No further legal proceedings can be instituted. This law will have an overriding effect over any other law in force.
- The law had an exception to the bar on instituting fresh proceedings with regard to suits that related to the conversion of status that happened after August 15, 1947. This saves legal proceedings, suits and appeals regarding change of status that took place after the cut-off date.
- The provisions of the law will not apply to ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It is also not applicable to a suit that has been finally settled or disposed of and any dispute that has been settled by the parties or conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence before the Act commenced.
- The Act does not apply to the place of worship commonly referred to as Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

### **Penal provisions in the Act:**

- Anyone who defies the bar on the conversion of the status of a place of worship is liable to be prosecuted. The Act provides for imprisonment up to three years and a fine for anyone contravening the prohibition.
- Those abetting or participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit this offence will also be punished to the same extent, even if the offence is not committed in consequence of such abetment or as part of the conspiracy.

### **Concerns raised:**

- There was strong opposition to the enactment of the law.
- In Parliament, the opposition questioned Parliament's legislative competence to enact the law as it pertained to places of pilgrimages or burial grounds, which were under the State List.
- However, the Union government defended it moves as making use of its residuary power under Entry 97 of the Union List to enact this law.

### **Legal standing:**

- One of the three judges on the Bench that decided the Ayodhya case in the High Court, made the following observation: "The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 does not debar those cases where declaration is sought for a period prior to the Act came into force or for enforcement of right which was recognized before coming into force of the Act."
- However, the Supreme Court criticised this view, saying it was contrary to the scheme of the law. The conclusion of Justice Sharma is directly contrary to Section 4(2) of the Act, it noted, and rejected it as "erroneous."
- In its verdict, the Supreme Court commended the law as one that preserved the constitutional value of secularism by not permitting the status of a place of worship to be changed and noted that the state has, by enacting the law, enforced a constitutional commitment and operationalised its constitutional obligations to uphold the equality of all religions and secularism, which is a part of the basic features of the Constitution.
- The SC has in its verdict has stated that the Places of Worship Act "imposes a non-derogable obligation towards enforcing our commitment to secularism." The court observed that "non-retrogression is a foundational feature of the fundamental constitutional principles, of which secularism is a core component."

- The court noted that historical wrongs cannot be remedied by the people taking the law in their own hands. In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future.

For more information on the issue click the below article:

1. [Ayodhya Verdict](#)
2. [Several positives for the Muslim plaintiffs](#)

## F. Tidbits

### 1. Carbon capture ways

- A study published in Nature investigates the potential scale and cost of 10 different ways of capturing and reusing carbon dioxide, such as in fuels, chemicals, plastics, and building material.
- The study has shown that on average, 0.5 gigatonnes of carbon that may escape into the atmosphere could be used by each pathway.

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. Kerala on track to eliminate TB by 2025:

#### **Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP):**

- Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program ('RNTCP) is the state-run tuberculosis(TB) control initiative of the Government of India. As per the National Strategic Plan 2012–17, the program has a vision of achieving a "TB free India", and aims to achieve Universal Access to TB control services.
- The program provides, various free of cost, quality tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment services across the country through the government health system. It seeks to employ the WHO recommended tuberculosis control strategy, DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course), to the Indian scenario.
- The Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme has initiated early and firm steps to its declared objective of Universal access to early quality diagnosis and quality TB care for all TB patients
- The goal of the NTCP is to achieve a rapid decline in the burden of TB, morbidity, and mortality while working towards the elimination of TB in India by 2025.

#### **CBNAAT /Genexpert machines:**

- The Genexpert is a machine that can detect 'mycobacterium tuberculosis' in a sample of sputum.
- It is a cartridge-based nucleic acid amplification test(NAAT) for simultaneous rapid tuberculosis diagnosis and rapid antibiotic sensitivity test. It is an automated diagnostic test that can identify Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MTB) DNA and resistance to rifampicin (RIF).

## 2. SeeTB: new diagnostic tool for detecting tuberculosis

- The World Health Organization has aimed at eliminating TB by 2035, and the Indian government has targets to do this by 2025.

## 3. Weeding out black hole mimickers by looking at gravitational waves

- The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) is a large-scale physics experiment and observatory to detect cosmic gravitational waves and to develop gravitational-wave observations as an astronomical tool. Two large observatories have been built in the United States with the aim of detecting gravitational waves by laser interferometry.
- The LIGO detectors in the US made history by directly detecting for the first time the merging of two black holes.
- INDIGO, or IndIGO (Indian Initiative in Gravitational-wave Observations) is a consortium of Indian gravitational-waveThis is an initiative to set up advanced experimental facilities for a multi-institutional observatory project in gravitational-wave astronomy located in Hingoli district, Maharashtra.
- The IndIGO Consortium has spearheaded the proposal for the LIGO-India gravitational-wave observatory, in association with the LIGO laboratory in the US.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to the Narmada River?

1. Narmada rises from Amarkantak Plateau region in Madhya Pradesh.
2. The river flows in a rift valley, flowing west between the Satpura and Vindhya mountain ranges
3. The rivers basin extends over the states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarath only.

### Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1,2 and 3

**Answer: a**

### Explanation:

Narmada River. The Narmada, the largest west flowing river of the Peninsula, rises near Amarkantak range of mountains in Madhya Pradesh. It is the fifth largest river in the country and the largest one in Gujarat. It traverses Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat and meets the Gulf of Cambay.

Q2. Which of the following species is not classified as critically endangered in India?

- a. Rameshwaram parachute spider
- b. Namdapha flying squirrel

- c. Pygmy hog
- d. Lion-tailed macaque

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

**Some examples of critically endangered species in India:**

Rameshwaram parachute spider, Namdapha flying squirrel, Pygmy hog, Great Indian bustard, Bengal florican, Jerdon's courser, Ganges shark, Pygmy Hog Sucking Louse, Northern river terrapin, Gharial, Chinese pangolin, Kondana soft-furred rat, Malabar large-spotted civet, Kashmir Stag.

**Some examples of endangered species in India:**

Red panda, Nilgiri tahr, Sangai, Asiatic lion, Bengal tiger and Lion-tailed macaque.

Note the list is not exhaustive.

**Q3. Which of the following pairs are not correctly matched?**

- a. Madhubani Paintings: Bihar
- b. Chanderi Sarees: Uttar Pradesh
- c. Bidriware: Maharashtra
- d. Gobindabhog Rice: West Bengal

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

Bidriware is associated with the state of Karnataka.

Bidriware is a metal handicraft from Bidar. It was developed in the 14th century C.E. during the rule of the Bahamani Sultans. The term 'Bidriware' originates from the township of Bidar, which is still the chief centre for the manufacture of the unique metalware. Due to its striking inlay artwork, Bidriware is an important export handicraft of India and is prized as a symbol of wealth. The metal used is a blackened alloy of zinc and copper inlaid with thin sheets of pure silver. This native art form has obtained Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

**Q4. Which of the following statements are correct?**

1. In India, more than 50% of the land is under cultivation.
2. The area under forest cover in India is about 30%.

**Options:**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer: a**



**Explanation:**

In India, about 51.09% of the land is under cultivation, 21.81% under forest and 3.92% under pasture.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are the laws regarding state surveillance in India? Discuss the need for well-defined laws to address this aspect in the present scenario. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. The recently passed Code on wages, 2019 is a welcome development. Discuss the main aspects of the code and the significance of the code. (10 marks, 150 words)

